

**Architectural Impact Assessment of dwellings on  
portion 9 of the farm La Mercy 15124 for Dube  
Tradeport Corporation**



*(Photo: Author March 2011)*

**Prepared for: Dube Tradeport Corporation  
15th floor, Marine Building  
22 Gardiner Street  
Durban**



**archaic consulting**

architecture: research: conservation: anthropology: impacts consulting

debbie whelan  
po box 21834  
mayors walk  
3208

tel: 033 3442522  
fax: 033 3443122  
cell: 083236 0410  
email: [debbie@archaic.co.za](mailto:debbie@archaic.co.za)

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## **1. Introduction**

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was approached by Ms. Jenny Mitchell of the Institute for Natural Resources to carry out an architectural assessment of the houses situated on portion 9 of the consolidated farm La Mercy with view to their demolition, given their position at the end of the runway and in the flight path at King Shaka Airport.

The families living in these houses were paid due compensation at the time of the expropriation. Despite this, they have been resident ever since. More recently, a change in ownership has meant that this situation has been remedied, and these families have been found alternative accommodation elsewhere. Ms .Mogie Reddy, still resident, was contacted for further elucidation, which did not reveal much extra, useful evidence.

## **2. Methodology and statement of expertise**

Ms Mitchell sent through some preliminary documents, including photographs taken at the end of 2010 to Archaic Consulting. A subsequent site inspection was set up, but arrival on site revealed that four out of five of the houses had already been demolished and were in the process of being cleared away by bulldozers. Little diagnostic evidence was left in the wake of the bulldozers.

In writing this report, the author has paid cognizance to the following:

- That these structures were possibly on properties awarded on release from indenture
- That they are common in the area, as vernacular responses to gradual prosperity and secure tenure
- That as a group they may have had a little value as a cultural system together with the cultivated fields, albeit isolated and impractical. Many similar, more practical examples exist in the area. Given the fragmentation of the group, this is no longer an option to present for their retention.
- The author has had to weigh up the consequences of the dwellings being located on the flight path, with their practical retention.
- The marginal nature of the people living on plots such as these makes intensive research within the scope of this document both impractical and unnecessary, and predictably, recourse to sources such as archives and published material has limited benefit.

### 3. History of site:

The original farm Klipfontein 922 was granted in its entirety of 4072 acres to Jan Isaac Meyer in 1850. This ended up in the hands of the speculators, Natal Company in 1857 and in 1860 Subdivision A was created and sold to Richard Godden. The remainder, after a couple more excisions, was sold to Saunders, who registered it in the name of the Tongaat Sugar Company in 1896.

Subdivision 1 of A was created in 1905, most likely to accommodate ex-indentured labourers. 41 acres in total was sold to Muniappa Naidu. In 1928, subdivision A was formed, of 16 acres, and sold to Murugan. This subdivision was renamed Subdivision 27 of 25. In 1964, it was registered in equal shares to DE Moonsamy, Lutchman Murugan Reddy, and Govindasamy. In 1976 the whole was transferred into the name of the Republic of South Africa.

The farming of these allotments and the corresponding dwellings is evident in the 1937 aerial photographs. However, it is strongly suggested that these structures are not this old, although parts of them may well be. This is corroborated by Mogie Reddy, and inhabitant of house number 1, who says that all the houses used to be constructed of wood-and-iron.



**Fig 1: Image showing position of houses relative to the runway of King Shaka Airport**



**Fig 2: Properties as discussed in this report**



#### 4. Assessment of House 1

House 1 is the only one remaining. It is of conventional construction, with brick and mortar plastered and painted. The windows are steel section, and the roof is double-pitched and Marseille-tiled. It is in reasonable condition, although the roof is decaying on the south west due to lack of maintenance. It is still occupied by Ms. Reddy who intends to move out in May.

At the time of original inspection at the end of 2010, there was a two-roomed wood-and-iron kitchen block at the rear. This has since been demolished and the materials retained for removal to the new site. In addition, the front veranda had a brick and mortar planter, which has also been recently demolished.

Ms. Mogie Reddy says that she moved to this house when she was a baby 49 years ago, and that most of the houses in the area were wood-and-iron. These were replaced with brick and mortar houses. She says that the wood and iron houses were there for many, many years before she got there, and that she thinks that most of them are 50 to 60 years of age.



**Fig 3: Side elevation (Photo J.Mitchell 2010)**



**Fig 4: Rear of building with wood-and-iron kitchen(Photo J.Mitchell 2010)**



**Fig 5: Rear of building with kitchen (Photo J.Mitchell 2010)**



**Fig 6: Side Elevation- note dilapidated roof and attached kitchen (Photo J.Mitchell 2010)**



**Fig7: Front elevation: note planter box (Photo J.Mitchell 2010)**



**Photographs taken at site inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011**



**Fig 8: Rear entrance: note slab in foreground**



**Fig 9: demolished flower box on veranda**



**Fig 10: Floor slab for wood and iron kitchen**



**Fig 11: View of front door**

**Statement of significance:**

significance	local	municipal	regional	national	international
Architectural	low	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low	low

*Recommendations: There is little diagnostic evidence to suggest that any part of this building is over 60 years of age. However, it is strongly considered that the wood-and-iron kitchen behind it, which has been recently demolished for removal to Tongaat, dates back to the early years of the last century, with the settlement of the indentured Indians. Recent lack of maintenance and isolation make scant case for retaining this building once it is evacuated. It is recommended that demolition be allowed.*

## **5. Assessment of Houses 2 through to 5**

These houses have all been recently demolished. Selected pictures taken by Ms Mitchell in 2010 are shown, together with rubble heaps. It must be noted that whilst any corrugated iron was possibly removed, there were remnants of asbestos roofing and stretcher bond Coronation brickwork, as well as vitrified clay piping.

### **5.1 House 2**

All evidence points to the bulk of this house being of conventional brick and mortar masonry construction, with a corrugated sheeting roof, which was most possibly removed by the demolishers or the previous residents. The main part of the roof was pitched with a lean-to section at the rear. The windows are standard steel section, the ones on the side elevations are in vertical format, reminiscent of earlier windows.



***Fig 12: Front of house number 2 taken in December 2010 (Photo: Jenny Mitchell)***



***Fig 13: Side elevation of house number 2, December 2010 (Photo: Jenny Mitchell)***





**Fig 14: Rubble heap-mixed brick and block (15/03/11) Fig 15: Rubble heap (15/03/11)**

### Statement of significance:

significance	local	municipal	regional	national	international
Architectural	low	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low	low

*Recommendations: This house may have been the single one which was constructed before 1951. Its condition appeared to have been reasonable. It is an example of a vernacular dwelling common to the Canefields area, of which many more exist. As with House 1 above, isolation would have made scant case for retaining this building once it was evacuated. Demolition, had it been sought, would have been recommended as an option.*

## 5.2 House 3

This house appears to have been of mixed and incremental construction. Parts of it consist of corrugated asbestos sheeting used for the walls and the roof, whilst others are of brick and mortar construction. There is no evidence of planning, and it has no architectural merit.



**Fig 16: House 3- Elevation (Photo: J Mitchell) Fig 17: House 3-Elevation ii (Photo: J Mitchell)**





**Fig 18: House 3- Elevation iii (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 19: House 3- Elevation iv (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 20: House 3- Elevation v (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 21: House 3- Elevation vi (Photo: J Mitchell)**

## Photographs March 2011



**Fig 22: Rubble: Vitrified sewer pipe**



**Fig 23: Rubble- stretcher bond brickwork**

## Statement of significance:

significance	local	municipal	regional	national	international
Architectural	low	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low	low

*Recommendations: This house consisted of a variety of different materials constructed at different times, including corrugated asbestos for some of the walling. It is an example of an incremental vernacular dwelling common to the Canefields area, of which many more exist. It had nothing to recommend its retention on any level. Demolition, had it been sought, would have been recommended as an option.*

### **5.3 House 4**

The open site was all that was left of house no 4. Pictures taken late in 2010 show a structure of sturdy brick and mortar construction, with a corrugated sheeting roof and standard steel windows. There is nothing to suggest that this building was over the age of 60 years. However, like house no 1, it had a wood-and-iron building at the rear, which probably served as the main structure until this was constructed in, most likely, the 1960s. It is a conventional house with little architectural merit.



**Fig 24: Side elevation of house number 4 taken in December 2010 (Photo: J.Mitchell)**



**Fig 25: Front elevation of house number 4 taken in December 2010 (Photo: J. Mitchell)**





**Fig 26: Old wood-and-iron building, at house number 4 in December 2010 (Photo: J Mitchell)**

### **Photographs March 2011**



**Fig 27: Site in March 2011**



**Fig 28: Site in March 2011**

### **Statement of significance:**

significance	local	municipal	regional	national	international
Architectural	low	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low	low

*Recommendations: This house was an example of a vernacular dwelling common to the Canefields area, of which many more exist. Its condition appeared to have been reasonable. As with House 1 above, isolation would have made scant case for retaining this building once it was evacuated. Demolition, had it been sought, would have been recommended as an option.*



## House 5

House no 5 has also been demolished. This was a modest structure of masonry construction with a corrugated iron roof and a whimsical 'stoep' wall in front. There is nothing to suggest that this building was over the age of 60 years, and no diagnostic material was found in the rubble. It had little architectural merit.



**Fig 29: House no 5, front elevation in December 2010 (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 30: House no 5, front door and 'stoep' wall in December 2010 (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 31: Side elevation in December 2010 (Photo: J Mitchell)**



**Fig 32: Rubble heap**

### **Statement of significance:**

significance	local	municipal	regional	national	international
Architectural	low	low	low	low	low
Historical	low	low	low	low	low
social	low	low	low	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low	low
technical	low	low	low	low	low

*Recommendations: This house was an example of a vernacular dwelling common to the Canefields area, of which many more exist. Its condition appeared to have been reasonable. As with House 1 above, isolation would have made scant case for retaining this building once it was evacuated. Demolition, had it been sought, would have been recommended as an option.*

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is not confirmed whether any of the buildings shown above are over the age of 60 years, and subject protection in terms of the Provincial Heritage Act no 4 of 2008. Establishing this information orally turned out to be vague, and the footprints on the 1937 aerial photographs are inconclusive. Furthermore, there is little diagnostic material which suggests that any of the structures above date back to 1951.

However, the incremental construction characteristic of marginalized settlements such as these would have grown from the original wood-and-iron two room dwelling erected initially, to more substantial buildings with prosperity. Given evidence in the photographs, and from others still standing in the area, all of these wood-and-iron buildings were most likely self-constructed rather than ordered out of a catalogue.

These wood-and-iron structures tell a story of economic growth and security of tenure, and are more important from an historical and architectural point of view than any of the masonry structures demolished, or standing. However, retrospectively addressing these buildings, which have been demolished and removed by their owners, is not practicable, given the site on the flight path, the isolation of these structures from formal townships, and the maintenance inherent in such structures. Rather, similar structures in more accessible places should be flagged for preservation in their contexts. However, with all of these instances, the economic status of the building owner must be scrutinized.

***In conclusion: It is recommended that, given the tenuous age of these buildings, the lack of diagnostic material, the lack of architectural, historical, social, scientific or technical merit, and the economic probability of keeping them, that demolition be allowed both retrospectively (for those demolished) and currently, for those still intact.***